



SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF SACAJAWEA

Sacajawea's people, the Agaidika (*Salmon Eater*) Shoshone were a nomadic tribe whose homeland was in the vicinity of present day Salmon, Idaho. In the autumn of 1800, during the annual buffalo hunt, a Hidatsa war party attacked the Agaidika at the Forks of the Missouri. Sacajawea, who was about 12 years old at the time, was taken hostage along with several other Agaidika. The Hidatsa took the hostages to the Knife River Village complex in present day North Dakota, a large Mandan and Hidatsa trade center. Within the next few years Sacajawea became the woman of a French Canadian trader and interpreter, Toussaint Charbonneau. The circumstances of their union are debated to this day. Charbonneau had at least two Shoshone "wives", the second from a tribe who lived south of the Agaidika.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition built Fort Mandan near the Knife River Village complex in preparation for the winter of 1804 – 1805 and hired Charbonneau as an interpreter in November, 1804. When Lewis and Clark learned Sacajawea's people were the Shoshone living near the divide between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, her interpretive skills became an unexpected benefit to hiring Charbonneau. Sacajawea gave birth to their son, Jean Baptiste on February 11, 1805. Charbonneau, Sacajawea and Jean Baptiste departed Fort Mandan for points west with the Expedition on April 7, 1805.

Sacajawea had an emotional reunion with her people in August when she learned that in the five years she was away, all but three of her relatives had died. When it came time to interpret she realized the chief was her brother, Cameahwait, another emotional reunion. Sacajawea's biggest contribution to the success of the Expedition was her skillful interpretation during the negotiations for horses. She also persuaded Cameahwait to postpone the Agaidika's departure for the annual buffalo hunt to help the Corps portage their supplies over Lemhi Pass.

After wintering at Fort Clatsop, the expedition started its return trip east in March, 1806. The party split at present day Lolo, Montana, where Lewis went north and Clark south. The Charbonneaus accompanied Clark. Sacajawea's role turned to guide when she led Clark to shortcuts at the Big Hole and Bozeman Pass.

The Charbonneaus left the Expedition on August 17, 1806 at the Knife River Villages where they remained for three years. In 1809 they moved to St. Louis. After two years, Charbonneau and Sacajawea left Jean Baptiste with William Clark to be educated in St. Louis and returned to the upper Missouri River. In 1812, Sacajawea gave birth to a girl, Lizette, at Fort Manuel where Charbonneau worked as an interpreter.

Most historians believe Sacajawea died on December 12, 1812 at Fort Manuel. But, according to Eastern Shoshone oral tradition, Charbonneau's other wife, not Sacajawea, died at Ft. Manuel. They believe that Sacajawea left Charbonneau in 1813, went to live with the Eastern Shoshones, and died on April 9, 1884, in Fort Washakie, Wyoming. She has a marked grave on the Wind River Reservation.